

Media and social solidarity: Vienna part II

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Wien: Life's a struggle

So should we worry if traditional journalism is in decline? Does it matter for democracy? [Our transatlantic conversation](#) now turned to the political impact of media change.

Paolo Mancini of Perugia University reminded us that the idea of media as fourth estate is historically a pretty recent and specific phenomenon. And the idea that newspapers are more than a product and have a part in democracy is even more limited.

In most places media is not separate from the state. (Many European newspapers get direct or indirect subsidies for example – I hadn't realised that Luxembourg newspaper ALL get a million euros of tax support each). And where it is commercial it is often subject to either profit or proprietorial political prejudices. And, Mancini adds, often media groups are highly influenced by political parties and religious organisations.

Of course, different cultures will also have different concepts of the value of freedom of expression. As [John Kampfner](#)'s recent book argued, people in say, Singapore, may be prepared to trade the classic idea of competitive, critical news media, for the social harmony that fosters material growth.

I suppose coming from Italy, Mancini is only too aware of how media can be captured. But you don't have to cite Berlusconi to believe that the current fourth Estate model is flawed. But is there a better version? Is the [Fifth Estate described by Alan Rusbridger](#) any better?

I was fascinated by the general bias against diversity expressed at this conference. Everyone wants pluralism, but they also want a defined space called Journalism that is protected and supported. Len Downie at least embraced the idea of working with non-profits, for example, but the Europeans were much more in favour of new taxes rather than new partners or new audiences.

There seems still, in this group at least, a reluctance to allow for the fact that public has moved on. It wants a more diverse political conversation and traditional news media struggles to provide that.

Frighteningly, many of the (mainly newspaper) Europeans here want more subsidy, more protection. Very few wanted to ask the public what they value or need. It took a Bulgarian, [Ivan Krastev](#) to make the link between struggling political classes and the traditional news media. If we want new politics, he suggested, then the old media system may not be the vehicle to deliver it.

See [Part One of this report here](#).

[These blogs were all in effect written live so I welcome any corrections – they do not pretend to be anything like a full record of the debates which were long and complex]

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